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WRITTEN HOME WORK IN FIRST YEAR GERMAN

Little by little modern language teachers are getting away from the idea that home written work is for the purpose of learning a new vocabulary or new grammatical principles. To be sure, the digging out of new principles and the looking up of new words is an excellent mental discipline, and if discipline is the sole end of modern language teaching, then by all means we should pursue this method of giving the pupil such a home task that, by dint of two or three hours "plugging" and by using all the mother-wit which nature has bestowed upon him, he can produce an exercise half-perfect. Under this method, the perfection of the product is not the end in view, it is a question of how much work he puts upon it. The student was laboring (literally) under this impression who came to me and complained that, although she put two to three hours on her preparation (whereas her classmates put one), nevertheless she got the lowest grade in the class. We are beginning to realize that the final test is whether the pupil knows thoroughly as much as can be expected, and not how much work he puts upon it. If he has attained this end, then the mental discipline, character building, and the development of patience and ingenuity will have come of themselves.

It is one of the truest of truisms that it is much easier work for the teacher to put the right idea, word, or grammatical principle into the student's head than to take a wrong one out and replace it by the right one. I often wonder if other German teachers have found that it is in general more difficult to teach German grammar to a student of German-American parentage than one to of Anglo-Saxon, due, no doubt, to the fact that there are so many wrong ideas to be removed. However, this will also be true of the Anglo-Saxon student, if we let him study out these principles for himself. He will in a majority of cases get the wrong idea, and then the teacher will have a double task, that of getting the wrong idea out and that of putting the right one in. Therefore, every bit of written work assigned for homework should be very carefully and minutely gone over in class the day before. Thus the written work becomes an excellent means for reinforcing and impressing what has been learned in class, and makes for thoroughness.

What should be the character of the homework? We often err in giving infrequent and difficult exercises, rather than simple and often very similar or even the same exercises frequently, for one thing learned thoroughly is better than a half dozen learned half-way. Such exercises as filling in blank spaces for endings, etc., are excellent exercises for home written work, in spite of the objection urged against them that a majority of the work is mere copying, for this mere copying is one of the things which impresses the feeling for proper order, tense and person forms, in other words "Sprachgefühl" upon the student's mind. Certainly the pedagogical logic, or the logical pedagogy of having students change whole sentences from one tense to the other or from singular to plural and vice versa cannot be denied, for it exercises in a practical way the fact that we speak in sentences and not in paradigms.

So much has been said by the advocates of the direct method against the use of English-German sentences that it is with fear and trepidation that I advocate this form of written work, and still maintain that I use the direct method. The objections generally urged against the use of English-German sentences are that they are disconnected, are also often impractical and silly, being sentences that none would ever have need to use, and violate flagrantly the wish of some direct "methodists" of keeping English as far away from the class-room as possible. These objections are all quite valid, with the exception that some of our more recent grammars are inventing sentences which deal with practical everyday matters, are simple, are centered around similar topics, and deal with only one, or at most two new grammatical principles. If we admit the validity of the objections against the English to German sentences, then the question is, do the advantages of their use outweigh the disadvantages? My experience seems to prove to me that they do.

What are the advantages of using English to German sentences in the first year? It coincides with the psychological principle of leading from the known to the unknown. Our grammars all begin with very simple sentences, all of which may be translated literally from one language to the other. This affords us an opportunity of using the similarity between the two languages, the cognates, etc. We can use the law of association of ideas

to the fullest degree, attaching the new words learned in class to the English cognates. As the work progresses we get farther away from the literal translation into the idiomatic, and here we can use the law of contrast to impress the words and principles upon the student's mind.

English to German sentences should never be used to teach entirely new words or principles, but there is nothing better to reinforce those learned in class than these very English to German exercises. Therefore they should come at the end of two or three days drill on the new vocabulary and the new grammatical principles. Furthermore, before being assigned as homework, these sentences should be studied orally in class, accompanied by questions from the teacher on the grammatical principles involved. This homework should then be carefully corrected by the teacher and the different kinds of mistakes indicated differently so that the student can know exactly what his error is. Another good method of accomplishing this result is to study the sentences orally to-day in class, make a translation at home, and to-morrow, putting this home translation aside, retranslate from these English sentences written on the board, while the teacher goes from seat to seat and corrects the sentences as they are written, explaining to the student his mistake. In this way accuracy and thoroughness is obtained and the student has the chance to profit by his error.

We sometimes fail to realize the importance of written work in our language teaching. Whatever our ultimate purpose is—to teach to read or to speak—written work is one of our most efficient means to attain our end, and we should use it very frequently, remembering, however, that it is a reinforcing agent and not a means of beginning to teach or learn.

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